

Sequels are something of a way of life in Hollywood. Characters in a popular and financially successful film are virtually guaranteed of having their continued adventures portrayed on the silver screen. No so much is this the case for video games.

Final Fantasy X-2 (Pronounced X-Two) should not be confused with Final Fantasy XII (Pronounced 12). Both are epic role-playing games for the PlayStation 2 Video game Console, however, 12 won't be released for at least another year, and X-2, even though it's the 12th Final Fantasy Game, (and the 11th for the home consoles,) is actually the first direct sequel to the popular franchise from powerhouse video game developers Square-Enix.

It's something of an anomaly for a video game, particularly in the epic "role playing" genre to follow the continuing story of a hero after a previous game's conclusion. Final Fantasy X-2 isn't the first game to attempt what ardent fans deem a "true sequel" but it is the first Final Fantasy game to attempt the feat.

The problems of creating a so-called "True Sequel" are twofold. One, game designers must be careful to create characters that don't defy the parameter's that endeared the characters in the first place, and two: designers of direct sequels have a tendency to assume that newcomers to the storyline have the advantage of knowing the back-story.

Final Fantasy X-2 fails on both counts. While most of the characters don't stray from their FFX iterations, FFX-2's protagonist, Yuna, has transformed from a dutiful but tragic heroine to a giggly, gun-toting school girl. Almost no attempt is made to explain the Final Fantasy X back-story, which is critical to the advancement of X-2's plot.

All of this would be forgivable were the game were accessible to non-gamers. For those unaccustomed to gaming, FFX-2 is just too much too quickly. Precious little attention is paid teaching the job, magic, dress up, and item management systems, instead gamers are thrown in to fast paced battles that proceed with little or no explanation, leading quickly to frustration.

Those looking to expand into the world of Roll playing games (RPG's as they're called), would be better served by first exploring Final Fantasy X—currently available at Sony's \$20 "Greatest Hits" price-point. Ten's linear plot procession and less hectic battle system is newcomer friendly.

That being said, gamers who "get it" are probably screaming at their radios right now. FFX-2 is a fantastic game and an entirely new experience that is to gamers a nostalgic trip through a fantasy world that many expected never to truly experience again. The "Dress UP" job system is Final Fantasy at it's very best and the non-linear, mission based-nature of the game affords unparalleled freedom of exploration throughout.

"Mainstreaming" FFX-2 would have been a mistake—this is game developed for fans of the genre and fans of Final Fantasy in particular.

Forgiving the game's penchant to digress into sophomoric humor and situations, FFX-2 is a great gamer's game. But it's not the game that's going to attract anyone to Role Playing Games for the first time or to video gaming in general.

Final Fantasy X-2 is available only on the PlayStation 2 home videogame console.

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